

Prague and Vienna

1854-1879

LITTLE IN KARL KAUTSKY'S FAMILY BACKGROUND and early life suggested that he would one day be the leading theoretician of a large Marxian working-class party. Born in Prague, 16 October 1854, Karl was the first child of seventeen-year-old Minna Jaich (1837-1912) and twenty-seven-year-old Johann Kautsky (1827-1896), both of whom were professionally associated with the Austrian theatrical world. In fact, Minna came from a family of actors and theatrical artists. Her father, Peter Anton Jaich, was a scene painter for theaters in Brünn, Prague, Vienna, and Klagenfurt, and also an actor. Johann Kautsky, though not of an artistic or theatrical family, had studied art in both Prague and Düsseldorf and made a life-long career of scene and stage design, serving a variety of theaters in Austria before setting up privately in 1871. On several occasions young Karl expanded his personal contacts with socialists outside of Austria while serving as a representative of his father's business.¹

Despite Kautsky's efforts in his memoirs to establish a vague proletarian pedigree for himself, his immediate family was not proletarian by any stretch of the imagination. Though Johann and Minna were somewhat short of money in their first years of marriage, they had family connections to fall back on in times of great need. By the time Karl was six years old, his father was able to provide the family with a comfortable income which supported even the "oriental luxury" of at least two servants. Karl's birth was followed by three others: Minna, 26 January 1856; Fritz, 9 December 1857; and Johann, 29 February 1864. The Kautsky family was an amiable one, and its members retained congenial, if not intimate contacts even after Karl's socialist activities carried him down a much different path. Shortly

after the death of his sister (who had married a successful architect), Kautsky wrote that he had not been close to his sister, even though they had not had disputes. Minna and Karl's second wife, Luise Ron-sperger, had been good friends, and Minna had been very close to the Kautsky children, but Karl and his sister had had only limited, friendly contacts. Kautsky was upset by her death because she had been relatively young—only forty-eight—and active, but the death of Marx's daughter Eleanor, to say nothing of Engel's death, had affected him more strongly.²

Kautsky did retain intimate ties with his mother, who lived in Berlin near Karl and Luise from 1904 until her death in 1912. Karl and the elder Minna developed an interest in contemporary philosophy and natural science at about the same time. Freed from housewifely responsibilities by the family's heightened standard of living after 1860, and influenced by Karl's first tutor, Adolph Chlumsky, and by a close family friend, Wilhelm Kleinberger, Minna turned to intellectual pursuits. In 1874, when Karl received a copy of Ernst Haeckel's *The History of Creation* for Christmas, he and Minna studied it together. This book was very important in the development of Kautsky's thought. Eventually, when he began to write his first socialist pieces, he showed them to his mother for advice and approval. As an old man he recalled that his mother "of all the family members exercised the strongest influence on me."³

Though at first Minna only criticized her son's efforts from a literary point of view, she later became something of a socialist writer herself. Her rather romantic socialist fiction won her a minor reputation among international socialists before anything was known of her son's work. One of Kautsky's earliest letters from a leading figure of the German socialist movement concerned Minna's most recent novella, which appeared in the Leipzig party newspaper in early 1877. At the end of his first meeting with Kautsky, Marx seemed to think more highly of the mother than the son. Reporting on this meeting to his daughter Jenny, Marx wrote: "When this charmer first appeared at my place—I mean little Kauz ["queer fellow"]—the first which escaped me was: are you like your mother? Not in the very least, he assured me, and I silently congratulated his mother." On the other hand, when seeking to praise an early journalistic effort by Kautsky, Engels wrote: "Your pamphlet shows that you have inherited the novelistic talent of your mother. I like it better than all your earlier things." Kautsky at least gained some recognition from having his mother's reputation precede his own introduction into socialist circles.⁴

Education

Kautsky was an early and avid reader. By the age of six he had read a collection of children's Bible stories, another of animal stories, and a children's edition of Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*; by eight he was particularly fond of geography. Because his parents were concerned about his health, he was tutored at home until he was nine. Beginning in 1864, he attended the old-fashioned and inferior Melk seminary, run by Benedictine monks. Then from 1866 to 1874, he attended the much more progressive Academic Gymnasium in Vienna. Kautsky remembered Melk as oppressive and stifling, the gymnasium as rigorous and boring. At the latter he studied religion, Latin, Greek, German, geography, history, mathematics, natural history, and, during the last two terms, philosophy. At Melk he had studied French as well as Latin, Greek, and German.⁵

Kautsky was a mediocre to poor student. At Melk his best year was his last, when he ranked eleventh in a class of twenty-one. At the gymnasium he fared little better, ranking around the middle of his class every year with two exceptions. In the 1866-1867 school year, a recurrence of a chronic illness toward the end of the term forced him to repeat the third form the following year. Passing out of the fifth form also required two tries. His performance in mathematics during the 1869-1870 term was so poor that it was judged unsatisfactory. Family complications prevented Kautsky from preparing for a special examination during the summer, and he had to repeat the fifth form the following year. He later offered a number of explanations for his rather poor performance at school. He recalled having been distrustful and suspicious of his teachers, though doubtless he shared these feelings with many of his fellow students. Second, since seating at the gymnasium was by rank, from front to back, Karl found himself at a disadvantage because of his poor vision; he was never near enough to the front of the class to follow closely what was happening. This was a particular disadvantage in mathematics, a subject for which he had little aptitude anyway. Finally, he suggested that sometimes his concern for extracurricular matters, as during the spring of 1871, when he followed the rise and fall of the Paris Commune, affected his studies adversely.⁶

At the end of his gymnasium career, Kautsky scored his highest marks in the history and philosophy examinations. In the fall of 1874, freed of any military obligation because of nearsightedness, he entered the university in Vienna with the intention of pursuing studies in "historical philosophy" to prepare for a career as a *Privatdozent* (a form of university lecturer) or a middle-school teacher. In his first term he

took courses in psychology, general and municipal history, physical geography, and two literature courses, one on Schiller and Goethe, the other on old German literature. By the following term, he had decided to become a jurist, but another bout of illness forced him to give up this more rigorous course of study. He noted in his memoirs that this decision was also readily influenced by the fact "that the oratorical gift was denied me." This same illness also forced him to end his brief career as a private teacher of gymnastics by which he had earned a little money.

In his third term at the university, Kautsky returned to his original plan of study and took courses in Roman history and the history of the revolutionary period (c. 1785-1815), and a course concerned with a descriptive comparison of the major European countries, which proved to be another course in physical geography. He eventually attended a total of nine semesters at Vienna, but never took a degree. Though for a time he toyed with the idea of doing a dissertation on Thomas Jefferson as envoy to revolutionary France, and thereby completing the degree requirements, his socialist activities eventually won out and turned him away from academia.⁷

Evaluating the impact of Kautsky's university experience on the development of his thought is difficult. He himself observed that he had learned little at the university because he was always at odds with his professors. He also felt that to a great extent all socialists are autodidacts since there "is hardly a university chair for socialist science in a bourgeois state," and like all autodidacts his own knowledge of socialism was acquired in a disorderly manner. Certainly socialist leaders during Kautsky's first years in the movement tended to see his university training as a distinct disadvantage. Writing to August Bebel in 1885, Engels observed that both Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein were "real pearls" compared to the rest of "the terrible literary new blood" of the party. However, Engels noted that Kautsky had learned a "frightful mass of nonsense at the university," though he "takes pains to unlearn it again."⁸

In a later letter, Engels spelled out more clearly just what it was about Kautsky's university training that made it difficult for the young Austrian to be an effective Marxian propagandist. Agreeing with Bebel's evaluation of Kautsky's work as hasty and incomplete, Engels explained:

You have exactly hit upon Kautsky's decisive weakness. His youthful inclination towards hasty judgment has been still more intensified by the wretched method of teaching history in the

universities—especially the Austrian ones. The students there are systematically taught to do historical work with materials they know to be inadequate, but which they are *supposed to treat as adequate*, that is, to write things which they themselves know to be false but which they are supposed to consider correct. That has naturally made Kautsky thoroughly cocky. Then the literary life—writing for pay and writing a lot. So that he has absolutely no idea what really scientific work means.

Engels added that though he sharply criticized Kautsky for these weaknesses, "I can comfort him with the fact that I did the same in my impudent youth."⁹

On the other hand, the sort of broad-ranging and rather disordered course of study Kautsky pursued at the university both reflected and molded his catholic intellectual tastes. Though he consistently considered himself a historian, his view of the discipline placed few limits on his scholarly activities. Strongly attracted by natural science, Kautsky was even more taken with efforts to apply the methods and conclusions of natural science, especially Darwinism, to the entire range of human history, including its social and economic aspects. Certainly this same inclination facilitated his conversion to Marxism, with all its comprehensive implications. The cockiness Engels referred to above became a sort of self-satisfied confidence as Kautsky matured, a trait which infuriated his ideological opponents immensely. And even his best historical works remained to the end marred by a willingness to claim conclusions with more assurance than his data allowed. At the same time, however, he retained throughout his life a willingness to learn, to study, to review and utilize the findings of others. In his first letter to Kautsky, Engels recognized the younger man's receptiveness and eagerness by observing, "You are one of the few of the younger generation who actually takes the trouble to learn something."¹⁰ Finally, Kautsky's eclectic intellectual tastes perfectly suited him for his life-long work, popularizing Marxism on all fronts.

During his university years Kautsky was confronted with a universal problem, that of a career. As he became more involved with socialism, his chances of being both a servant of the state as a teacher and an opponent of the state as a socialist made this goal less reasonable. Quite naturally, given his immediate family background, Kautsky's inclination was to look to the arts and literature for an alternative. For a time he tried his luck as a muralist and painter. But discovering the difficulties of this career, and having been warned by a doctor that such work could cause permanent damage to his already weak eyes, he

turned to literature (though how much easier on his eyes reading and writing would be is not clear). As early as his years at the Melk seminary, Kautsky had done some creative writing, but none of these efforts was ever published. In 1875-1876, Johann Kautsky enjoyed enormous success with a stage version of Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*, and in response to this success, Karl, who had been encouraged by his father to write a play, produced a scientific fantasy in a similar mood. The play, the *Atlantic-Pacific Company*, was concerned with the construction of a Panama-Nicaragua canal, both as a scientific exploit and as a dramatic setting. The play met with only limited success; it played twenty times in Vienna in late 1877 and early 1878, had a short run in Graz and Berlin, and was sold to a London director, Edmund Gerson, for the impressive sum of five shillings. Kautsky followed the play to Berlin in 1879 and while there expanded his contacts with German socialists. Its failure to achieve major success, coupled with his increasing occupation with the socialist movement, led Karl to abandon his career as a playwright.¹¹

Becoming a Socialist

Although both his father and maternal grandfather had played minor roles in the revolutionary events of 1848, Kautsky recalled in his memoirs that until his own involvement in the socialist movement, his immediate family was virtually apolitical. The closest thing to political consciousness in the family was a strong though sporadic Czech nationalism, a sympathy Kautsky shared for a time and one which was intensely felt by his first tutor, Adolph Chlumsky. The lack of political awareness and activity in the Kautsky family reflected several aspects of its existence. First, the theatrical environment is not one into which political developments regularly intrude. Second, after 1863, and several moves back and forth between Prague and Vienna, the Kautsky family settled in the latter city, where they were part of a small Czech minority in the midst of an overwhelming German majority. This minority status was not conducive to political activity, though it did reinforce Kautsky's Czech consciousness.¹²

The third reason for the Kautsky family's lack of political activism was the most important. For a number of years Johann Kautsky was either directly or indirectly dependent upon support from the state theaters of Vienna, and the possibility that oppositional political activity would endanger this support encouraged the family to remain apolitical. In his memoirs Karl passed this fact off as more of an irritant than an obstacle to his socialist activities. Yet, presumably, his father's

dependence on state support was the reason he used pseudonyms on his earliest published work. Of the many names and initials so used—"K.," "K.K.," "St.," and others—"Symmachos," which means "comrade-in-arms," was the most common. And in a 1911 letter to his wife, Kautsky suggested that his father's relationship with the Austrian state was something more than an irritant, and he further revealed the family's reaction to his socialist proclivities. "Again and again," he wrote, referring to the years after 1874, "I had to hear that he [Johann] was employed at the Hoftheater, I would ruin him and the entire family if I involved myself with revolutionary elements." Even his mother, who was more sympathetic to socialism than was her husband, feared some horrible fate for her son. Kautsky noted that though his father's opposition was not especially harsh, in a way it was the more oppressive because it was not based on a conflict of ideals, "but sprang from fear."¹³

Where did Kautsky's socialist political consciousness come from? He was not of a working-class family, nor did he have extensive contacts with workers and their problems. His schooling was not the sort that yielded revolutionaries. He was not of a rebellious nature, and though perhaps he was not perfectly adjusted to the milieu of his youth, no particularly outstanding trauma marks the years immediately preceding his conversion to socialism.

Tracing the origins of Kautsky's socialist thought is made more difficult by the fact that at the age of eighty-two he began a memoir in which he discussed in considerable detail what he felt were the important intellectual influences of his early life. How much of this was the product of a perfectly natural effort to impose order on his intellectual development—perhaps more than had actually existed? How much was the product of faulty recollection? To ask these questions is not to suggest that Kautsky purposely distorted the account of his intellectual origins. Rather these questions implicitly challenge the notion that Kautsky's thought, or that of almost any other intellectual, developed systematically or linearly. With how much confidence can a historian say that Kautsky took a particular idea from a particular source and that he later added a particular refinement from another particular source?¹⁴

The temptation to be overly specific in identifying sources of thought must be resisted. For instance, most critics of Kautsky's thought have emphasized the influence of Darwin. That he read and was influenced by Darwin is indisputable—Kautsky himself recorded this in his memoirs, and even the most cursory review of his earliest published work will substantiate this influence. However, it is a major

step from this assertion to the contention that Kautsky took his general outlook, or even many specific points, directly from Darwin. At about the same time he read Darwin, in the early 1870s, he also read and was influenced by Ernst Haeckel and Ludwig Büchner, and the latter had postulated biological evolution some years before the publication of Darwin's theory. Thus, if the historian is accurately to reproduce the conditions surrounding Kautsky's development, the problem is not just one of identifying specific sources, but also one of identifying and analyzing what others have called the "climate of the times."¹⁵

Thinking back after sixty-five years, Kautsky was able to pin down quite precisely the emergence of his political consciousness. In the summer of 1868, he paid a visit to an aunt and uncle who lived in a rural Bohemian village. Czech nationalist sentiments were running high that summer, as was peasant agitation. Kautsky remembered being profoundly impressed by this activity and recalled that after this visit he began to read the Viennese newspapers not only for "the theater and disasters," but also for "political correspondence and editorials." The sporadic Czech nationalism of the family surfaced in Kautsky for the next two years, and he considered himself "an outspoken Czech nationalist," with an infatuation with the great Italian spokesman of emerging nationalist movements, Garibaldi.¹⁶

A flirtation with Czech nationalist sentiments suited Kautsky's position very well during those years. To a young, intellectually curious boy living in an environment dominated by Czech artists and actors, but surrounded by the more mundane German burghers of Vienna, such sentiments offered an outlet for mild adolescent rebelliousness and also satisfied a theatrical need for the dramatic. Karl, like his siblings, had appeared on the stage, first playing in *Faust* at the age of six; his early inclination to write stories and plays is further evidence of a dramatic bent. His family's world was not necessarily one of make-believe, but it was one in which neither the blunt material demands of the working class nor the crass commercial exigencies of the petite bourgeoisie tied the emotions of youth to political and economic realities. The atmosphere of the Kautsky home was one of the "highest intellectual [or spiritual—the word *geistig* is more ambiguous than its English translation] activity," in which "energetic idealism" aroused in young Karl a "thirst for knowledge."¹⁷

Because Kautsky derived his Czech nationalism from rather insubstantial, though none the less real, sources, it was not a long-lived emotion. The sort of constant reinforcement such youthful passion usually requires was not present in Vienna, where his schoolmates were mostly Austrian Germans and where his father dealt professionally, if

not personally, with a predominantly German world. Though many of the family friends were Czechs, they were not the anti-Austrian peasants of rural Bohemia but a much more cosmopolitan and culturally integrated artistic elite. Karl had learned both Czech and German as a small child, but his mother was never very comfortable with Czech, and German was generally spoken at home. The most regular source of news for the family was not Czech nationalist or peasant journals, but the German-language, bourgeois press of the Austrian capital. In this environment Kautsky's Czech nationalism could hardly survive for long, and it did not.¹⁸

The most immediate source of Kautsky's conversion to a more radical political awareness was the content of the ideology prevalent among intellectual Czech nationalists during the late 1860s and the 1870s. The outstanding figure during this period was the historian Frantisek Palacky (1789-1876). In addition to being a romantic Czech nationalist who glorified Bohemia's past in service of its future, Palacky was also a political liberal, strongly influenced by the principles of 1789. Despite the implications of 1848, especially in Germany, that the earlier identity of radical politics and nationalism was drawing to an end, in the reactionary, multinational Austrian Empire of the last half of the nineteenth century this equation still carried a great deal of weight. That Kautsky could come to what he called "French-republican radicalism" by way of Czech nationalism was entirely consistent with the close interrelation of the two ideologies at the time.¹⁹

Two events powerfully reinforced the radical political content of Kautsky's Czech nationalism in early 1871. First of all, in the spring of that year, in the wake of the German victory in the Franco-Prussian War, Paris rose in rebellion against the invading forces and the rest of France to found the famous and infamous Commune. Between the great French Revolution and the Russian Revolution of our own century, few events provoked more extreme ideological splits in Europe than did the rise and fall of the Commune. At the time, and for years after, it was the model of the future for the working-class-oriented left of the political spectrum and the symbol of the horrors and extremism of lower-class political power for the peasant-bourgeois forces of the center and right. Kautsky's romantic radicalism ensured that his sympathies would be with the Communards, and these sympathies then pushed his political radicalism to identification with the socialism presumably characterized by the Commune.²⁰

The second major influence on Kautsky in 1871 was his reading of George Sand's romantic novel *The Sin of M. Antoine*. In his memoirs he recalled that the Commune roused in him an interest in socialism and

sympathy for the workers, but that these sentiments had only an ethical and not a rational content, and that though "ethical necessity is the starting point of all socialist striving and thought," without a basis in "economic and historical knowledge" such sentiments are a dead end. Presumably Sand's novel offered him an introduction to the knowledge necessary to give socialism a firm basis. In his memoirs he strongly emphasized the impact of *The Sin of M. Antoine*, but only in the sense that it showed him the need for study and that the coming of socialism would require a long process of development.²¹

However, another source reveals a much different role for Sand's work in Kautsky's life. As already noted, Karl's family, especially his father, were greatly concerned about the politically dangerous consequences of socialist activities and opinions. Furthermore, Kautsky found himself isolated: "None of my relations, no friends of the family, none of my fellow students could tell me what socialism was," he recalled. In the midst of this isolation, and even hostility, Karl found comfort and support in reading and rereading *The Sin of M. Antoine*. Many years later he wrote to his wife: "In this situation I accidentally found the book of George Sand. It filled me with jubilant delight. It gave me certainty and courage. It did not show me my way . . . but it smoothed the way for me, let me scorn all objections and condemnation, all ridicule and ruin. . . . Ever since I held onto the book like an old friend who helped me through a hard time—perhaps the hardest, because I was still so young and growing up in respectful awe of my parents." This letter clearly shows that the novel, far from providing Kautsky with guidelines for the rational pursuit of socialism, offered powerful emotional support to a romantic young man who felt himself besieged from all sides.²²

To the reader today, *The Sin of M. Antoine*, or *Le péché de M. Antoine* (1846), seems a hopelessly romantic tale of trials and heroics. Emile, the communistically inclined son of the ultimate bourgeois, M. Cardonnet, falls in love with Gilberte, daughter of Antoine, Comte de Chateaubrun, a fallen-from-riches, but still honorable, aristocratic landowner. M. Cardonnet, who has long been concerned with his son's rejection of the material world of business and his attraction to intellectual pursuits, strikes a bargain with Emile. He will approve his marriage to Gilberte if Emile agrees to abandon his chimerical dreams of human harmony and devote himself to the family business. In the end Gilberte is revealed to have been the product of an adulterous relationship between M. Antoine and the long-dead wife of the fabulously wealthy communist, M. le Marquis de Boisguilbault—this was the sin of M. Antoine. Through the good offices of Jean

Jappeloup, the all-good, freedom-loving petty artisan, M. Antoine and M. le Marquis are finally reconciled, whereupon the latter leaves his fortune and estate to Gilberte and Emile. He exhorts them to turn their inheritance to the service of communism, but only after mature reflection and study. M. Cardonnet reconciles himself to Emile's new wealth, and everyone lives happily ever after.

The characters in *M. Antoine* are overdrawn and overly simplistic. M. Cardonnet is harsh, cunning, antiintellectual, and rejects his wife. Jean Jappeloup rebels against the coming of the factory system and becomes an outlaw while trying to serve his fellow humans. Gilberte, beautiful of course, bears the burdens of the fall from riches with true nobility. The situation is a little silly, with the supposedly hard-headed, practical Cardonnet obstinately constructing his factory on a stream for which both science, in the form of his son's geological and hydromechanical study, and native intelligence, in the person of Jean, predict periodic and disastrous flooding. But with such material, Sand was able to make her point clearly: the conflict between the bourgeois world of industrial capitalism and the finer world of intellectual, spiritual freedom under communism. The "entire absence of idealism" in M. Cardonnet is revealed in his criticism of Emile's failure to acquire practical skills at the university: "and I tell you all this fine philosophico-metaphysico-politico-economical learning is of all things the vainest, the falsest, the most chimerical and the most ridiculous, not to say the most dangerous, for a young man." On the other hand, Emile's rejection of his father's material acquisitiveness and glorification of capitalist competition is no less dogmatic:

No, father, never! . . . for that is not the road for mankind to follow. There is in it no trace of love or pity or gentleness. Man was not born to know naught but suffering and to extend his conquests over matter only. The conquests of the intellect in the domain of ideas, the pleasures and refinements of the heart, which, according to your plan, should be carefully regulated accessories of the workingman's life, will always be the noblest and sweetest aspiration of every normally constituted man. . . . O father, instead of fighting with the strong against the weak, let us fight with the weak against the strong.²³

As a full-grown Marxist, Kautsky would later deny many of the notions in *M. Antoine*—the implicit antiindustrialism, the supposed virtues of petit bourgeois artisans, and the reliance on inherited

aristocratic wealth for the founding of the communist society, for instance. But in 1871, the romantic drama of Emile's situation made a strong impression. Here was support for his own sympathies for the underdog, for his own aversion to "the brutal arrogance of the victors" over the Commune. Here, too, was evidence that he was not alone, that socialism and the cause of humanity had already won far-flung support. Many themes in Sand's novel were to be persistent concerns of Kautsky's for the rest of his life. The inherent, but often unperceived, conflict between the workers and the owners in industry, the need to base socialism on education and knowledge, and perhaps the view of the coming of socialism as a product of intellectual activity (though this last point will require much closer analysis before it can be accepted) are all themes which the writings of the mature Kautsky share with *The Sin of M. Antoine*.

By late 1871, Kautsky's Czech nationalism had become a vaguely socialist, democratic radicalism characterized by romantic sympathies for the lower classes and a sense that knowledge and study would show the way of the future. In 1873 and 1874, he wrote a series of articles and short stories, none of which ever reached the press, in which he sought to reconcile capital and labor by means of "equality, freedom, improved and general education, elimination of idleness, and gradual elevation of the workers into capitalists." Politically, Kautsky felt that these ends could be achieved through the establishment of a federal republic with unconditional freedom of speech, press, and assembly, general and equal franchise for both sexes, and free education through high school with additional aid for poor students. This radical republican state was to overcome worker-owner conflicts by gradually buying up factories and turning them over to the workers to be run as cooperatives.²⁴

With the exception of this last point, the political notions Kautsky held at this time were rather standard fare for the radical democratic left throughout Europe. Furthermore, the elimination of conflict through the establishment of worker-run cooperative industry not only was central to Lassalle's plan for Germany, but had earlier been proposed by French socialists, particularly by Louis Blanc in the 1840s. Long afterward Kautsky denied any familiarity with either of these two sources at the time, but the ideas of the French social thinkers had appeared in the Czech nationalist press and even in Vienna's liberal bourgeois press, and by 1864, Lassalle and his plans had been covered by these papers. At any rate, Kautsky's attitudes at this time were not based on a *Weltanschauung* at odds with that of the leftist opposition in

Europe through most of the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century. Radical democracy and ethical socialism were both consistent with the dominant Christian world view.²⁵

At about this same time, Kautsky began to come under the influence of what was probably the most significant intellectual development of the last half of the nineteenth century, the rise of positivism and materialism and the decline of religion. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the inability of traditional society to cope with the changes produced by the rise of capitalism and industry, plus the specific demands of industry itself, initiated a twofold change in intellectual activity that dramatically affected the dominant world view of Western society. On the one hand, there was an increasing emphasis on rational analysis and a collateral rejection of traditional authority. On the other hand, the demands for improved technology for industry led to an ever more detailed and rigorous analysis of the makeup of the material world. An extreme example of the first of these tendencies was the rational and historical critique of Christian dogma undertaken in Germany by the Young Hegelians. Beginning with David Strauss's *Life of Jesus* (1835), this movement culminated in Ludwig Feuerbach's anthropological atheism and his somewhat crass materialism. The tendency to ever increasing analysis of the material world came to a climax, as far as notions of human uniqueness were concerned, with the validation of organic evolutionary theory offered by Darwin in 1859 and 1871. In the hands of other scientific analysts, or natural philosophers as they continued to be called until the end of the nineteenth century, the social and philosophical implications of Darwinism were often carried to the same conclusions as those reached by Feuerbach: atheism and materialism. The second of these tendencies had the greater influence on Kautsky, serving as the basis of a new *Weltanschauung* which was at odds with that of radical democracy and ethical socialism.²⁶

Buckle, Haeckel, and Büchner

The major sources of Kautsky's contact with natural-scientific and materialist thought during the early and mid-seventies were Henry Thomas Buckle, *The History of Civilization in England* (first translated into German in 1859 and 1861), which Kautsky read during the summer of 1874; Ernst Haeckel, *The History of Creation* (1868), which Kautsky received as a Christmas gift in 1874; Ludwig Büchner, *Force and Matter* (1855); and, of course, Darwin's two major works, *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871). Kautsky felt that

Darwin's works were the most important influence on his own views of nature and, to the limited extent Darwin dealt with social animals and the origin of society, of society also. But he was even more impressed with Haeckel's attempts to apply the observations of natural science to human society, and found Buchner's much more daring, almost socialistic, conclusions the most attractive of all. Darwin's work requires no summation here, and the full impact of Darwin on Kautsky, as mediated by Engels, will be dealt with in the next chapter. But in order to get a feeling for Kautsky's intellectual milieu during the mid-1870s, a brief review of Darwin and longer summaries of Buckle, Haeckel, and Buchner will be useful.²⁷

Darwin did not, of course, introduce evolutionary theory; Lamarck and Goethe became famous for similar theories many years before Darwin, and Ludwig Buchner asserted a theory of descent from one or a very few primary forms in his 1855 work. Darwin was, however, the first to provide a convincing theoretical model for a mechanism of evolution, natural selection, and thus invested evolutionary theory with the kind of scientific legitimacy it had previously lacked. What most impressed Kautsky was the extent to which Darwin was able to eliminate references to a deity from explanations of the origins of living organisms and by this suggest that perhaps the Christian God was not a necessary reference for comprehension of the nature of the world. Like most young radicals of his time, Kautsky saw the various forms of organized Christianity as obstacles to both practical social progress and the intellectual emancipation that accompanied this progress. The strength of reactionary clerical parties in Vienna during the 1860s and 1870s gave substance to the first of these objections, while Karl's years at Melk, which he had found extremely oppressive and stultifying intellectually, gave him personal experience with the second. Thus Darwin's impact on Kautsky at this time not only was personally liberating, in that it paved the way for his natural-scientific and materialist *Weltanschauung*, but also provided potential weapons for an attack on the political and social structure he was beginning to turn against.

Kautsky recalled long after the fact that the major impact that the works of Haeckel and Buchner had on him came from their efforts to apply natural-scientific observations to human society. That Kautsky could have drawn much from the social criticism of Ernst Haeckel is doubtful. Haeckel, who became Germany's leading proponent and popularizer of social Darwinism in its most blatant forms, emphasized heredity and almost totally excluded environment as a causative agent when discussing human behavior. Thus he objected to advances in

medical science because they allowed the weak and sickly to survive and propagate; he opposed the move to abolish capital punishment because this would perpetuate the class of criminals, which Haeckel saw as an almost exclusively hereditary group. This sort of anti-humanitarian, anti-lower-class analysis could not have struck a responsive chord in the young Kautsky, so recently inspired by Sand's picture of the nobility and misfortune of the lower classes.²⁸

Haeckel was also extremely ethnocentric and decidedly unhistorical and unsophisticated in his defense of the white European tribes, as he called them. His laws of increasing perfection and differentiation in human evolution, coupled with a staggering lack of cultural awareness, allowed him to write nonsense like the following: "Among the lowest tribes of nations, most of the individuals resemble one another so much that European travelers often cannot distinguish them at all. With increasing civilization the physiognomy of individuals becomes differentiated, and finally among the most highly civilized nations, the English and Germans, the divergence in the characters of the face is so great that we rarely mistake one face for another." Haeckel used pseudo-scientific arguments of natural tribal and even specific superiority to justify the extermination of American Indians and European imperialism in general. Even in his very earliest writings, Kautsky was entirely free of Haeckel's strong sense of racial and cultural superiority.²⁹

On the other hand, some aspects of Haeckel's work reinforced Kautsky's budding socialist and natural-scientific, materialist position. When very early in the *History* Haeckel asserted that "the highest triumph of the human mind, the true knowledge of the most general laws of nature, ought not to remain the private possession of a privileged class of savans [sic], but ought to become the common property of all mankind," Kautsky must have nodded heartily in agreement. Kautsky was also attracted by Haeckel's boldness and his confidence in natural science. Haeckel contended that the origin of species by natural selection was "a *mathematical necessity* of nature which needs no further proof" and that "the actual value and invincible strength of the Theory of Descent does not lie in its explaining this or that single phenomenon, but in the fact that it explains *all* biological phenomena." As a representative of positivism, Haeckel gave expression to its extreme rationalism by formulating law upon law which supposedly attested to the regularity and order, and therefore the material foundations, of the world. Finally, Kautsky's growing materialist and anti-Christian posture received powerful support from Haeckel's dogmatic contention that "the soul of man, just as the soul of

animals, is a purely mechanical activity . . . that . . . is transmitted by inheritance, . . . just as every other quality of the body is materially transmitted by propagation."³⁰

Kautsky's contact with Haeckel did not end with his reading of *The History of Creation*. In 1882, encouraged by his Viennese friend Heinrich Braun, and with a letter of introduction from Victor Adler, Kautsky approached the university in Jena, where Marx had got his doctorate by correspondence, with hopes of getting his recently completed study of the family and marriage accepted as a doctoral dissertation. Kautsky introduced himself and his study in a long letter to Haeckel, who at the time occupied a chair at Jena. Though Haeckel seems to have been impressed with the study, Kautsky never received the degree because Haeckel could only examine in zoology, and the Jena authorities determined that, in the absence of a university position in ethnology, Kautsky's study most closely fit into philology. In the fall of 1882, Kautsky abandoned his efforts after having traveled to Jena to try to settle the matter. Eventually his study of the family and marriage was published by the Stuttgart journal *Kosmos*. Haeckel was closely associated with this journal, which later became one of the main sources by which his "monism" was popularized, and he may have arranged for the publication of Kautsky's study.³¹

Like that of Haeckel, Buchner's work was characterized by an almost incredible confidence and a powerful sense of finality, of having discovered truth, or at least the way to truth. In the preface to his first edition (1855), he wrote: "*It is part of the very nature of philosophy to be intellectually the joint property of all,*" a sentiment later echoed by Haeckel. The two men were similar in other ways as well. Buchner's work went through at least fifteen revised German editions, and in the later editions he quoted copiously from Haeckel and commented favorably on much of Haeckel's work. Both insisted on a monistic, as opposed to a dualistic, view of the world that was based on the assertion that all things were subject to natural, mechanical laws and forces. Both argued that the only differences between the organic and the inorganic were of degree, not kind. Both asserted the identity of the brain and mind, body and soul. Both accepted a hierarchical conception of the world of organisms, with perfection increasing from plants to animals and, within the animal phyla, to humans. Both rejected the Christian God and all forms of deism, and both gave free will an extremely limited range of action. If anything, Buchner was even more racist and ethnocentric than Haeckel, arguing that Europeans and the "negroes of Eastern Africa" had almost nothing in common: "Their reason is not like ours. . . . Compassion, uprightness, gratitude, prudence, family

affection, modesty, conscientiousness, and remorse are unknown things. . . . [They have] no history, no traditions, no poetry, no morality, no imagination, no memory."²²

In contrast to Haeckel, however, Buchner much more directly took up the philosophical implications of his work. He rejected materialism, idealism, spiritualism, and in fact all systems. "Science," he wrote, "is not idealistic, nor spiritualistic, not materialistic, but simply natural; she seeks to learn everywhere facts and their logical corollaries, without doing homage in advance to a system in this or that direction." Buchner saw science as merely rationalistic and empirical. Also unlike Haeckel, he did not view the human species as an end, but rather saw it as a transcendent phase in the ongoing process of evolution. He also admitted that much remained to be explained in nature, but argued that "we ought not to hold Nature responsible for this, but only the imperfection of our knowledge."²³

All this clearly points up the difficulties of precisely indicating sources for Kautsky's thought. The intellectual climate of the times was virtually permeated with bold and confident proponents of a natural-scientific, naturalist-materialist world view. Though almost all such writers paid homage to the achievements of Darwin, many of those who influenced Kautsky went far beyond Darwin's cautious observations on the social realm to make radical and strikingly modern, but also often naive and unfounded, assertions. In his memoirs and many of his early and late writings, Kautsky indicated that much of his thought was taken from Darwin, but he used this name as a shorthand symbol for a much more complex group of influences.

For instance, Kautsky claimed that Darwin was the source of his own conviction that the so-called social instinct, far from being of divine origin, was natural.²⁴ But the following passage from Buchner reveals a possible alternate source for this observation:

Now seeing that man is essentially a social being, and can, without society, either not exist at all or only be thought of as a predatory animal, it becomes easy to understand that his living in social communion with others must have saddled him with duties of reciprocity which in the course of time developed into definite moral axioms. The beginnings of this are to be found in family life, which in the sequel developed into tribal and national life. Morality is therefore much older than religion, the latter being only a requirement of the individual, while the former is a requirement of society and had its germ in the earliest beginnings of social co-existence.²⁵

In other words, morality, or the "ethical impulse," was the product of the natural social condition of humans, not of divine intervention or religion. The conclusion, then, was not exclusive to Darwin, though validation by reference to lower animals may have been. For Kautsky the critical point was the naturalness, that is, the nondivinity, of the ethical impulse, something which Büchner asserted no less plainly than did Darwin. In his first presentation of his own views of the origin of social instincts in humans, Kautsky referred to both the social organization of lower forms of life and the natural necessity of the ethical impulse in human society.³⁶

Finally, Kautsky claimed to have been much impressed with Büchner's near socialist positions. Here Büchner was very much in conflict with Haeckel and Buckle with whom he otherwise shared so much. Kautsky was much taken with passages like this: "Society must be so organized that the welfare of one shall no longer be conducive to the detriment of others, as is now too often the case; everyone ought to find his own interest indissolubly connected with that of all, and on the other hand the welfare of the community should be like a mathematical function of the welfare of the individual." Strikingly lacking in class awareness, phrased in moral rather than determinist terms, this passage nonetheless represents better than anything in Haeckel, Buckle, or Darwin, the position toward which Kautsky was moving in the mid-seventies.³⁷

The impact of the fourth major intellectual influence of the presocialist years, Buckle, was of a much different sort than that of Darwin, Haeckel, and Büchner. Though Buckle claimed to be writing a natural-scientific history of man, he was far less concerned with biological and physical phenomena than with intellectual factors in the shaping of human society. His science consisted of maintaining that all human actions were motivated by antecedent conditions and stimuli "and that, therefore, if we were acquainted with the whole of the antecedents, and with all the laws of their movements, we could with unerring certainty predict the whole of their immediate results." Buckle was not certain that he could identify all the antecedents of human action, but his confidence that all could be known, and that accurate prediction could derive from that knowledge, was an ideal that Kautsky shared for most of his life. This attitude was a further reflection of the confidence inspired by scientific advances during the last half of the nineteenth century.³⁸

Buckle's *History of Civilization in England* was a curious work that began by denying that previous historians, concerned as they were with politics, diplomacy, and courts, had done anything of value. Buckle

then asserted in pseudo-materialistic terms that climate, food, soil, and something he called "the General Aspect of Nature" were the most important physical agents influencing human development. He also contended that in countries in which a capricious nature prevailed, the inhabitants developed the imaginative faculties of the mind at the expense of the reasoning ones, and as a consequence such countries remained culturally and intellectually backward. And finally, in what seems a clear enough statement, Buckle wrote that "the history of the human mind can only be understood by connecting with it the history and aspects of the material universe."³⁹

But from this point on the *History of Civilization* took a much different turn. Buckle held that civilization was the triumph of the mind over external agents and that therefore mental laws were more important than physical ones, and he argued that "the growth of European civilization is solely due to the progress of knowledge." He then proceeded to explain the French Revolution as the exclusive result of the impact of English intellectual notions on prominent Frenchmen, with no reference at all to material conditions in France. Buckle further undermined the earlier intimations of a materialist outlook by declaring that "the real history of the human race is the history of tendencies which are perceived by the mind, and not events which are discerned by the senses." Finally he concluded the journey from pseudo-materialism to idealism with the observation that "in every great epoch there is one idea at work which is more powerful than any other, and which shapes the events of the time and determines their ultimate issue." Many of these oddly contradictory notions were to be treated in a different and more consistent manner by the young Kautsky.⁴⁰

First Publications

Kautsky's earliest work was published primarily in two journals of German socialism, the *Volksstaat*, which appeared in Leipzig and was replaced on 1 October 1876 by the *Vorwärts*; and secondarily in the Austrian socialist press—the *Gleichheit*, which was published in the Neustadt suburb of Vienna, and *Der Sozialist*, which originated in Vienna proper. Though he joined the tiny Austrian party in January 1875, almost two-thirds of his writing from then through 1878 appeared in the Leipzig journals, in part because the German press was much more prosperous, in part because the Austrian press was harassed by censorship and forced shutdowns. The majority of more than seventy-five articles written in his first four years as a socialist fell

into two categories: those dealing with natural-scientific matters and their relationship to socialism, and those dealing more reportorially with political and socialist developments in Austria. Only one article from this period, "The Physiognomy of Today's Society," *Vorwärts*, 31 March 1878, dealt directly with economic questions, and few articles show any particular Marxian influence. Though Kautsky mentioned Marx several times, and even published a translation of a portion of Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy* in the *Gleichheit* in September 1875, little overt sign of his growing Marxism appeared in print until 1878.⁴¹

One of Kautsky's major preoccupations during the early years was to bring natural science, especially Darwinism and related theories, to the service of socialism. During the seventies and eighties, the great majority of German writers who tried to apply aspects of Darwinian theory to the human realm were anything but socialists. The concepts of struggle and survival of the fittest seemed to offer a solid scientific basis and rationalization for the acquisitive, competitive capitalism of early industrialization. Socialism, which evoked the brotherhood of man and noncompetition as ideals of social organization, appeared unscientific in its rejection of conflict and competition. Kautsky's efforts, therefore, often took the form of criticizing writers who argued against socialism because it was contrary to the prevalent natural-scientific concepts. This was the format for his two-part article entitled "Socialism and the Struggle for Existence," which appeared in the *Folkstaat* in early 1876.⁴²

This article began by reviewing some of the many attacks directed against socialism by its opponents, who contended it was immoral, traitorous, based on thievery, antiscientific, and so on. Kautsky accepted the assertion that socialists were the enemies of capitalism, but staunchly denied that they were the enemies of science. Science, he wrote, offered socialism help in its fight against "the old world" and gave it "its best support." Therefore, he continued, socialists cannot be still when attacked as antiscientific, otherwise confusion would result in the ranks of socialism and the enemy would be strengthened, albeit only temporarily. More specifically, Kautsky directed his attention to three works: *Die Darwinische Theorie* by Georg Seidlitz, *Der Kampf ums Dasein* by Robert Byr, and *Culturgeschichte* by Friedrich v. Hellwald. These men variously argued that the rejection of private property would of necessity lead to the decline of humanity (Seidlitz), that constant struggle among humans was a natural law (Byr), and that if the socialists were to win, it would only be the result of might over right, since the domination of one part of mankind over another was natural law also (Hellwald).

Kautsky admitted that the struggle for survival was an organic law to which all beings were subject, but he contended that the very means by which this struggle was carried on were subject to development and that for some organisms, like bees and ants, groups formed the basic unit of the struggle, not individuals. Because the conditions under which some animals live dictate the "solidarity of its members," the herd or family prevails over the individual. Kautsky argued that such was the case for humans, among whom "instinctive solidarity rules as a weapon in the struggle for existence in society." Among certain humans, namely the bourgeoisie, industrialists and speculators, in "the salons of Paris and the anterooms of the Winter Palace," the struggle of all against all went on; bourgeois science established this conflict as a basic principle of social organization, claiming Darwinism as natural-scientific justification for the "purest egoism" of social life.⁴³

What this picture of human life overlooked, according to Kautsky, was that humans are often motivated by ideals, by an instinctive solidarity that has brought people to die for tradition, for monarchs they have never seen, for the tribe, and even for the state, "which often has taken their last penny from them." In the second part of the article, Kautsky expanded on the notion that abstract ideals serve as foci of solidarity, and that group, rather than individual, struggle prevails among humans. What was instinctive solidarity in lower animals became moral duty in humans; groups came to focus around the state or nation, race, and church, all abstract ideals. But under the economics of capitalism, all such ideals are gradually undermined, and rapacious individual competition destroys solidarity and returns humanity to the more primitive form of one against one. Kautsky concluded that only socialism could overcome the divisive aspects of bourgeois society, and that socialism was "the higher step of the normal historical development of the struggle for survival." Finally, Kautsky claimed that all zoological, anthropological, and historical evidence demonstrated that the strongest social instincts prevailed in the absence of private property, and that therefore the proletariat of modern society, those without property, would form organizations of the greatest solidarity to ensure the victory of socialism.⁴⁴

Evidence of the influence of Darwin and, to a lesser extent, Büchner abounds in this article. Kautsky attempted to use the master and his discipline against the opponents of socialism and to imply that Darwinism was being misused as a defense of the bourgeois order. His critique of the bourgeois proponents of Darwinism in the social realm was valid in that they did miss the collective or social aspects of human life; his efforts to tie social instincts in humans to naturalistic rather

than divine origins gave at least a semiscientific substance to this critique. But the influence of Buckle is also apparent. Darwin presented social solidarity as a response to pressing and persistent demands of the environment and as a form of behavior which became instinctual with time. Kautsky's substitution of moral duty, of abstract ideals, for instinctual behavior represented a leap from naturalism to romantic idealism that held socialism to be a moral duty without linking this duty to material conditions in the lives of the working class. Just as Buckle moved from a position that held the mind to be causally related to the material universe to one in which ideas had independent qualities, Kautsky moved from naturalistic arguments for social instinct to viewing socialism as a moral but not a material imperative.

Finally, this article demonstrates the extent to which Kautsky remained under romantic influences in 1876, which helps explain the inconsistencies of his theoretical analysis. In imagery and style, "Socialism and the Struggle for Existence" represents some of his most effective writing. In later years, as he got more "scientific," his style became heavy and pedantic. But more importantly, several passages reveal the intensity and passion of his belief in socialism: "Were socialism not a fight for natural right against the most revolting injustice, were it not a doctrine of brotherly love which binds all workers and will unite all of humanity, and if in socialist society the higher development of all personal qualities were impossible, only then would the proclamation of socialism make no sense."⁴² George Sand had scored heavily with young Karl, and the science was still a rationalization for, or an attempt to give validity to, an essentially moral commitment. In many ways the rest of his career, especially his adoption of Marxism, can best be understood as a continuing effort to provide the scientific support the times demanded for the cause to which he gave sixty years of his life.

In his memoirs, Kautsky reported that he first read *Capital* in 1875 and that under its influence he spent much time in the years that followed studying economics and economists. However, though his published work in the years 1875-1879 contains several references to Marx, there is little evidence that the Marxian analysis of history and society made much of an impact on the young Austrian until the end of March 1878. As late as 8 March 1878, in an article entitled "History and Socialism," Kautsky identified geography, geology, physiology, and the natural sciences in general as concerns of future historians who had freed themselves from the domination of Christian idealism. Surely his failure to mention economics in this context shows that Kautsky was less influenced by Marx during these

years than he later suggested. In fact, as far as its historiographical outlook is concerned, this article did little more than paraphrase Buckle.⁴⁰

Kautsky was so far from being under the influence of Marx's conceptions during the early years that Engels singled out some of his work for criticism. At the time Engels did not know the identity of the author of the pseudonymous articles that disturbed him. In a letter to August Bebel, Engels commented on the state of theory among the younger writers of the movement:

But it seems to be impossible for our people, at least a number of them, to confine themselves in their articles to what they have really comprehended. In proof take the endless columns theoretically socialist in content which have been penned by Kv, Symnachos and all the rest of that crowd, whose economic blunders, erroneous views, and ignorance of socialist literature furnishes the best means of thoroughly destroying the theoretical superiority of the German movement up to now.⁴¹

Kautsky later observed that it was no wonder Engels complained about the quality of the work which appeared in the *Volksstaat*, since it really had been bad. But, Kautsky added, much of the blame for the poor quality had to go to the editors of the journal, who should have given guidance to their young contributors. Specifically, Kautsky blamed not the official editors, Wilhelm Hasenclever and Wilhelm Liebknecht, but the latter's son-in-law, Bruno Geiser, who frequently served as de facto editor when the other two men were occupied with their official duties as socialist representatives in the Reichstag. The fact that Geiser and Kautsky became outspoken enemies after 1883 must be considered when assessing Kautsky's criticism of the *Volksstaat* editorial staff. But it is true that during the four years Kautsky contributed articles to the *Volksstaat* and the *Vorwärts* only one editorial note was attached to his work commenting on the accuracy of his facts and interpretation. Certainly the brash young autodidact could have benefited from more active guidance on the part of the editorial staff. In later years, when he became an editor himself, Kautsky tried to provide such guidance to his younger co-workers.⁴²

At the same time that many of Kautsky's articles were appearing in the *Vorwärts*, a long series of articles by Friedrich Engels was also being carried by the journal. Published in many parts beginning on 3 January 1877 and running through 7 July 1878, this series was collected into book form and published in October 1878 under the title *Herz Eugen*

Dühring's Revolution in Science. It soon was called simply *Anti-Dühring*. This book was probably the most influential single work in winning young German socialists to the cause of Marxism. Certainly it was instrumental in the conversion of Kautsky and of Eduard Bernstein, onetime closest friend and later revisionist antagonist of Kautsky. Bernstein said of *Anti-Dühring*: "It converted me to Marxism." Kautsky felt that "no book had done so much for the understanding of Marxism as this one."⁴⁹

Even though Kautsky did not thoroughly study the complete *Anti-Dühring* until the winter of 1879-1880, some effects of his reading of the articles began to appear in his writing by the spring of 1878. On 31 March, Kautsky's first article primarily concerned with economics was published, and in it Kautsky referred to "economic relations" as "the basis of society." This assertion differed markedly from his 8 March evaluation of the subjects important for future historians, and it reflected his emerging Marxian orientation. Two weeks later, he further indicated the direction in which he was inclining by observing in another article that labor and capital are not opposites in and of themselves, but only to the extent that these concepts represent social relations of production.⁵⁰ Kautsky certainly did not become a Marxist between 8 and 31 March 1878, but by the latter date he was beginning to change his views somewhat, moving from an obsession with natural-scientific explanations of the origins of humans and their society to an increasing awareness of the importance of economic matters. Several more years of diligent study with Bernstein and careful guidance from Engels would be required before Kautsky would consider himself a consistent Marxist.

Austrian Socialism

The party with which Kautsky was associated for his first five years as a socialist could not begin to satisfy the young intellectual's rather grandiose visions of the future of the movement. Founded in April 1874, the Austrian Social Democratic Workers' Party suffered from several major weaknesses that kept it small and politically insignificant for a long time. By the late 1870s the Austrian Empire was far from being a major industrial nation. Though it had experienced some industrial growth since 1850, especially in railroad construction, by 1870 the industrial working class comprised only 12 percent of the total population, and by 1880 still only 27 percent. Moreover, the largest concentration of industrial workers was in Bohemia, where other factors worked against close ties with the Austrian party. To further

complicate things for the socialists of the Hapsburg empire, Austria was entering a period of severe economic depression at the time the party was founded. Taking 1873 levels as 100, by 1875 production in the coal-mining industry had fallen to 89, in iron ore to 76, in beer and brewing to 56, and in brick-making to 25; obviously employment suffered proportionately. In correspondence to the *Vorwärts* from Vienna, dated 26 May 1877, Kautsky reported that since 1 January there had been only nine new construction starts in the entire city, and workers had flocked to each one willing to work for any wage. High unemployment and migration out of depressed areas reduced party and trade-union membership and undermined the spirit of those in the movement. Even among artisans and handicraftsmen, typically the most fruitful recruiting grounds for young socialist parties, the mid-seventies were hard times. In 1873, the Vienna shoemakers' union had 962 members, by 1876, only 186; during that same period the Graz woodworkers' union membership fell from 600 to 150.⁵¹

Austrian socialism was also rent by internal disunity from the very beginning. Not surprisingly, a party based on the multinational conglomeration that was Austria reflected many of the problems generated by the clash of nationalities. These problems are too complex to deal with here, other than to indicate that the German portions of the Austrian Empire, especially Vienna, played a disproportionately large role in the movement and thereby irritated the other national groups. One historian of Austrian socialism concluded: "One serious hindrance to the further development of the Austrian workers' movement was the deficient understanding of a part of the German-speaking workers' leaders for the national needs of the non-German-speaking (*anderssprechenden*) workers."⁵²

During the early years of the Austrian Social Democratic Workers' Party, a far more frequent and divisive internal conflict than that of the nationalities was one based on differences in tactics and conceptions of the nature of the party. In part because the immediate predecessor of the party, the Arbeiterbildungsverein (Workers' Educational League), was born during that brief springtime of liberalism which followed the Austrian defeat in the 1866 war with Prussia, the Austrian movement was from the beginning split between those who sought to ally the workers with the bourgeois forces for change and those who argued that the workers had to be independent from, and indeed opposed to, bourgeois liberalism. The former group was encouraged by J. B. Schweitzer, Lassalle's successor as president of the Allgemein deutsche Arbeiterverein, to support the Austrian liberals against the reactionaries, a position which, given the strong

German nationalism of Austria's liberals, exacerbated relations with non-German groups within the working-class movement. Supporters of this view in the Austrian party were headed by Heinrich Oberwinder and were generally referred to as the moderates. Those who wanted to maintain the complete independence of the workers and form them into a separate political party were headed by the Scheu brothers (Andreas, Heinrich, and Josef), Johann Most, Emil Kaler-Reinthal, and others, and were generally known as the radicals.²²

With the establishment of the social democratic party in the spring of 1874, the radicals won out over the moderates, but at virtually the same time a new tactical split began to develop which would once again divide the party into two, and then three, groups. In 1876, reunion with some of Oberwinder's former supporters reopened the old moderate-radical split. In August of that same year, Kaler-Reinthal's effort to lessen governmental persecution by adoption of a more moderate program fed this split. However, in the following years an even more disruptive internal division emerged when many Austrian socialists, especially Most and Andreas Scheu, turned toward a form of anarchism inspired by the famous Russian, Mikhail Bakunin. By 1880-1881, the party had developed three factions—one that argued in favor of legality and cooperation at all cost, one that was increasingly inclined toward illegality and even violence, and a third which sought cooperation with, but independence from, other groups within the empire opposed to the reactionary government. This latter group emphasized education; their program included democratic and state-supported cooperative planks which reflected the strong Lassalleian influence at work in Austria.²³

Internally divided and weakly based as it was, the Austrian party was an easy and constant prey for the Austrian government. The franchise was limited to less than one-third of the adult male population and was based on a three-class system of voting that favored the wealthy and elected a Reichsrat with very few powers. The imperial government was adept at other forms of harassment and oppression as well. Many socialist leaders were prosecuted for treason and lesser antistate activities; socialist meetings were frequently forbidden or disrupted even when they met the stringent requirements of state laws; and journals were constantly censored or banned for printing or attempting to print articles offensive to the state. The Austrian police were particularly good at bribing or blackmailing socialist leaders into serving as agents—Dr. Hippolyte Tauschinsky, a prominent early leader of the movement, was revealed as a police agent in 1874 after having been under suspicion for years, and even Kaler-Reinthal even-

usually served in the same capacity. All in all, the government that learned its oppressive techniques from a master, Prince Metternich, was able to hamper severely but never quite eliminate the socialist movement.⁵⁵

When Karl Kautsky joined the Austrian party in January 1875, the dominant split was between Oberwinder's moderates and the Vienna-centered radicals led by the Scheu brothers and, following Andreas Scheu's emigration to London in July 1874, by Johann Schwarzinger. Kautsky allied himself with the radicals because they seemed to be opposing the "corruption and cowardly opportunism" of the moderates. Despite his absence, Andreas Scheu continued to influence the Austrian movement, and shortly after Kautsky joined the party he began a correspondence with Scheu which molded the younger man's political and party attitudes for the next four or five years. Scheu's influence was the first example of something that characterized most of Kautsky's career as an active socialist. Though he often developed theoretical positions on his own, he never felt comfortable in practical political matters unless he could receive close counsel from someone whose political acumen he trusted and respected above his own. Scheu was followed by Bernstein and Engels in this role, and then Bebel. Scheu's influence on Kautsky was of considerable importance, and the former's gradual conversion to anarchism elicited a similar temporary development in Kautsky, just as many years later Kautsky would become the theoretician of SPD "centrism" under the influence of Bebel's practical politics.⁵⁶

Kautsky's role in the Austrian party was a model for all his later participation in the German and international socialist movements. He took no part in administration or organization, either of the party or the trade unions; he neither held nor ran for public or party offices; he was exclusively a propagandist, teacher, and very occasional speaker. Though he frequently attended meetings of the party leadership, listening with interest to what went on and learning from it, he very rarely contributed. In fact, as a lecturer to trade unions and workers' educational leagues, Kautsky probably had more direct contact with workers and rank-and-file party members in the first years in Austria than at any other time during his more than six decades as a socialist. He lectured mostly in history, especially on Rome, the sixteenth century in Germany (concentrating on the peasant wars, on which topic he later wrote a book), and eighteenth-century French intellectual history as the ideological background to the French Revolution. In his memoirs Kautsky noted that the governmental observer, a required guest at all working-class gatherings, usually brought the

history of the eighteenth century to an end in May 1789—before the outbreak of revolution.³⁷

Having aligned himself from the beginning with Scheu's radicalism, Kautsky followed when this radicalism began to turn into anarchism. Besides Scheu's influence, the conversion to anarchist sympathies also reflected his frustration with the small size and impotence of the Austrian party. In his role as correspondent from Austria to the *Vorwärts*, Kautsky repeatedly emphasized the ineffectiveness of the party and its persecution by the state. His first report opened with this observation: "There is certainly nothing more thankless than being correspondent from Austria for a social democratic paper. There is not a political life here for the working class, [not] even a scanty one, what the laws graciously grant is reduced by unheard of interpretations." Kautsky excused long gaps in his correspondence by contending that nothing was going on in the Austrian movement. Given the revolutionary inclinations of a young romantic, this stagnancy could only arouse enthusiasm for "propaganda of the deed." If nothing was happening in Austria, socialists had to take steps to stimulate activity.³⁸

By late 1877, Kautsky's radicalism had developed to the point of support for Lassalle's conception of "one reactionary mass," the if-you-are-not-with-us-you-are-against-us view of nonsocialists which Marx complained about when it cropped up in the 1875 Gotha program of the German movement and against which Kautsky himself was later to campaign vigorously. In a lead article for the *Vorwärts*, Kautsky coupled this notion with a critique of German bourgeois science: "The unification of all parties into a single reactionary mass against the socialists always increases; it always becomes more difficult for a friend of true freedom to belong to any other party than the social democratic. This phenomenon is revealed not only in the political and social realms, but also in the scientific." The prominent German scientist Rudolf Virchow had made the mistake of denying that theories of descent as applied to humans were as yet sufficiently proven to be taught as scientific fact, while arguing that religion should continue to be part of the school curriculum. Kautsky attacked Virchow both for his blindness in refusing to accept descent theories and for his absurd support for religious education, as though religion were fact. This article closed with an impassioned description of the world as divided into the defenders of limited science, militarism, the church, and suppression on the one hand, and the defenders of the general franchise, press and organizational freedom, the abolition of the standing army, labor, and democratic science on the other. Kautsky saw no third possibility; whoever would be consistent and defend any

one position from either group must favor all others of that group. This article clearly reveals the tendency of the young Kautsky to couple science and democratic socialism into a comprehensive *Weltanschauung*.⁵⁹

A series of events in 1878 acted on Kautsky's radical inclinations to move him even closer to anarchist sympathies. Early in that year, revolutionary activities in Russia, especially Vera Zasulich's attempt on the life of a government official, prompted Kautsky to write an article in which he called upon his Austrian comrades to take the courage and self-sacrifice of their Russian counterparts as an example. Of course such sentiments could not get by the censors and into print. This episode marked one of the very few times Kautsky came into personal conflict with the law, for not only was the article suppressed, but Kautsky was summoned to court to face possible criminal prosecution. On the advice of a sympathetic lawyer, he simply said nothing in court, and since the article had been written under a pseudonym the charge against him was dropped. Later in 1878, the famous assassination attempts on the German kaiser occurred. Kautsky's response was to point out that even though the Austrian government did not have the comfortable excuse of an assassin, it none the less oppressed the working-class movement. He implied that Austrian socialism did not have much to lose by assassination attempts, since rights that did not exist could not be suspended. Finally, late in 1878, the German government responded to the attempts on the kaiser's life by outlawing social democracy. The German party and its press capitulated rather quietly, and when this was contrasted with the high level of Russian revolutionary activity at about the same time, the German passivity did not come off well with many of the fiery young men of the Austrian movement. When Johann Most, who had moved from Austria to Germany and then to London, began to publish his anarchistically oriented *Die Freiheit*, the breach left by the virtual disappearance of the less radical German socialist press was partially filled. For a few months in 1879, Kautsky served *Die Freiheit* as correspondent from Austria, and he recalled many years later that even after he had begun to contribute to the exiled German social democratic press, he had "certainly moved away from Most, but . . . still had not broken with him completely."⁶⁰

For a number of reasons the young Austrian's flirtation with anarchism was brief. By late 1877, Kautsky had already developed an elaborate natural-scientific, socialistic world view and had begun to give expression to his strongly theoretical inclination in articles contributed to both the Austrian and German socialist presses. Though at

this time his work was still frequently marked with romantic overtones, he was moving rapidly toward a more rationalistic, less passionate analysis of human society and away from the youthful obsession with vigorous, and perhaps fruitless, action. The theoretical content of the anarchism of Most and his Austrian followers was less than impressive; it could hardly occupy the full time and attention of Kautsky's eclectic and ambitious intellect. Moreover, by the end of the seventies he had not yet decided on a career. Having given up law, convinced that a socialist would not be tolerated as a teacher in the state-controlled schools of Austria, he had nearly decided to use a recent inheritance from his grandfather to set himself up as a bookseller, with supplemental income to be derived from writing. However, the socialist press of Austria was not nearly large enough to allow Kautsky to support himself with his pen; to make a living as a writer he would have to find a richer field to work in than the tiny and oppressed Austrian movement. Finally, just as he was deciding to become a bookseller, he was offered a subsidized position among the exiled German socialists in Zurich. In accepting this offer, he was assured of a market for his socialist work, but only if he completely abandoned his quasi-anarchist sympathies. His move to Zurich also took him out of the environment of Austrian socialism which was becoming increasingly dominated by Most's brand of anarchism. The combination of his developing *Weltanschauung*, his desire to make a living as a socialist, and his removal from Austrian influences ended Kautsky's anarchism forever.⁴¹

The offer of financial support came from Karl Höchberg, a wealthy German socialist. In 1879 Höchberg founded a new journal, *Jahrbuch für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, which appeared in Zurich. One feature of the *Jahrbuch* was to be reports on the progress of socialist movements in various countries, but Höchberg knew no one from Austria to call upon for this duty, so he asked Wilhelm Liebknecht for a recommendation. Liebknecht, who had been personally involved in the Austrian movement since at least 1869, suggested Kautsky, whom he had met in Leipzig in 1877 when Karl was representing his father's business consortium. During 1879, Höchberg and Kautsky established a correspondence; Höchberg was also the first to pay Kautsky for a piece of socialist writing; and on 8 October 1879, Höchberg put up 400 gulden to help finance the publication of Kautsky's first book. In addition to giving indirect financial support to young socialist intellectuals, Höchberg also provided direct subsidies, as in 1879 when he brought Eduard Bernstein to Zurich to serve as his personal secretary. Höchberg was sufficiently impressed with Kautsky's potential to

write to him on 17 January 1880, offering to pay his passage to Zurich and to support him while he devoted himself to serious scholarship and socialist literature. By four o'clock on the afternoon of 23 January 1880, Kautsky had arrived in Zurich, thus beginning forty-five years of virtually unbroken devotion to German socialism.⁶²